

# Signposts to expulsion

DAVID DE BEER

**“WHEREAS the Administrator-in-Executive Committee has, in terms of section 1(1) of the Undesirables Removal Proclamation, 1920 (Proclamation No. 50 of 1920) as amended, directed me to issue an order to you THE RIGHT REVEREND COLIN O'BRIEN WINTER to leave the Territory of South West Africa before 12 noon on the fourth day of March 1972 . . . . .”**

On October 10th, 1968, The Very Reverend Colin O'Brien Winter, Dean of St. George's Cathedral, Windhoek, was elected Seventh Bishop of Damaraland in succession to Bishop Robert Mize, his American predecessor who had been forced to leave South and South West Africa because the Republican Government refused to extend his temporary residence permit.

Some people have said that from that day onwards it was inevitable that Colin Winter would follow Bishop Mize's example and be forced out of his Diocese; but what is so important about South West Africa, and what happened within the territory and within the Anglican church there to make the authorities act in this way against two successive bishops?

The church in South West Africa is probably in a completely different kind of position from the church in the Republic. It was the missionaries of the Rhenish mission, and later the Finnish mission, who first brought education and medical services as we know them today to the territory, and for the last one hundred and twenty-five years the churches have been developing the country with the result that they are far closer to the people than the churches in South Africa. In Ovambo-land particularly where there is still a feudal economy the church is the great social institution of society, and its grasp on the people there is not unlike that of the church of early 18th century England. The church is then a very strong mirror of society; what society does is reflected in the church, and what the church does is reflected in society.

It is not surprising then, to find that the

church is in conflict with the South African government over the development of South West Africa, because the vast majority of people within the territory are completely opposed to South Africa's imposition of apartheid. And the churches by themselves cannot reconcile the separation that South Africa has brought to the territory with the reconciling message of the Christian Gospel. This was very beautifully brought out in Bishop Leonard Auala's address to Mr. Vorster in August last year, when the Prime Minister met with Lutheran Church leaders over their rejection of South Africa's policies. The churches had also consistently opposed the whole system of migratory labour as exemplified in the contract system under which Ovambo men were forced to leave their wives and families for between twelve and eighteen months if they wished to earn a cash wage with which to pay their taxes or buy "luxury" items such as sugar and clothes. It was not only the theory of the system that was under attack, but also the way in which it was operated resulting in large compounds of contract workers living in cramped and often filthy conditions with no recreational facilities.

The churches were alone in their criticism, for white South West African politics have never had a liberal or progressive front at all, and the only English daily newspaper in the country insist on taking a "verligte" non-political line, and any white who steps out of line must be prepared to risk social ostracism at the least, and possibly his job. Non-church multi-racial gatherings have been almost totally unknown.



Bishop Winter was bishop in Windhoek for just on forty months, and in that time some eighteen permits were refused to, or withdrawn from, Anglican church workers, effectively hindering their work and mobility in their spheres of operation.

The first of these was in the opening days of 1969 when the mission hospital secretary was expelled from Ovamboland, less than a week after taking up the post. In this and all subsequent cases no reasons were even given.

For some two years this "moderate harassment" continued: another hospital secretary was expelled from Ovamboland, teachers' permits were refused, a former teacher was not allowed to return to South West Africa after furlough in the United States; but it was in 1971 that the pressure began to be felt more strongly, and in April a priest was refused permission to enter a Herero Reserve to take a service for an old, crippled woman.

June 1971 saw the opinion of the International Court in The Hague rule South Africa's occupation of South West Africa illegal, and in July the Lutheran Churches came out strongly against South Africa with Bishop Auala and Moderator Gowaseb's Open Letter to Mr. Vorster (SASH September 1971). Bishop Winter, in a statement issued on July 25th, 1971, gave his complete support to the Lutheran leaders. "The Christian Church as the conscience of this nation must now speak out with clarity and without fear," he wrote, "Apartheid must be denounced as unacceptable before God. Who else but the leaders of the Churches can do this?"

On July 27th, two days after his support for the Lutherans, Bishop Winter applied for a permit to visit the Kaokoveld in the north western corner of South West Africa, an area inhabited by the Ovahimba people, primitive and largely heathen. On July 28th the Bantu Affairs Commissioner refused the application, stating he was under no obligation to give reasons. This was the first action taken against the Bishop himself.

Preparations were being made for the biennial Synod in October, and part of the preparatory work should have included a visit from a senior priest and the diocesan treasurer to Ovamboland to help brief the delegates from Ovamboland on procedures and contents, but after two days' wait these permits were also refused, and when the Bishop pointed out that these were to be visits on "official church

business" and that one priest already had a permit for this visit, the only reply that could be elicited from the Bantu Affairs Commissioner was, "I have to inform you that on instructions from the Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development, I may not issue a permit to any private individual to visit Ovambo."

Such actions could not pass without comment at the Synod, and on Oct. 1st the Bishop delivered his charge to the gathered delegates. "We as a church have committed the unforgivable sin, we have committed the unpardonable crime of rejecting apartheid . . . Apartheid has been a barren and costly failure. As an Anglican Bishop I reject apartheid on Biblical grounds; on humanitarian grounds for the endless suffering it is causing the poorest in our community; for the damage it is doing to whites who are benefitting from it at the expense of the poor . . . It is to the constant dishonour of totalitarian states when they seek to avoid admitting their mistakes by the brutal imprisonment or banishment of those who seek to face them with the misery their policies are causing . . . There comes a time to speak. We have licked our wounds and have been browbeaten by petty government officials for too long." The synod also passed a resolution condemning apartheid as a "sin of the first degree", and gave its support to Bishop Auala and Moderator Gowaseb.

Within two weeks the first reprisal followed: the principal of the Anglican High School in Ovamboland had her 'residential and visiting privileges' for Ovamboland withdrawn, and was given forty-eight hours to leave, which meant that the students had to prepare for the end-of-year exams with one teacher for two classes. It was at this point that Bishop Alpheus Zulu of Zululand commented, "It is difficult just now to know how one should react. It is obvious that the Diocese of Damaraland is engaged in a battle for its life." More refusals followed in quick succession as replacement teachers applied for permission to enter Ovamboland for the purpose of teaching at the High School.

As a blow against the Lutheran churches the South African government refused to extend the residence permit of one of their pastors, a chaplain to school students and teachers. Addressing the farewell service Bishop Winter said that despite its peaceful ethic, the church should not lie down. "We have been silent too



long. There is a State-Church confrontation and we did not want it, yet we shall not retract nor retire from it. The church will never lie down under apartheid. It is anti-Christian, and the Government better understand it."

The next day the Bishop left on holiday to Cape Town, and four days later six thousand Ovambo contract workers went on strike against the contract labour system which the churches had been condemning for so long. The strike was essentially a Christian action, an attempt by Christian laymen to improve a society which they experienced as inherently un-Christian in its attitudes. "If Christ came into the world to set us free," one of the strikers wrote, "why must we be slaves to the contract labour system?" The editorial of the Nationalist Party mouthpiece "Die Suidwester" on December 13th, the first day of the strike, implied very strongly that the strike was a consequence of the churches' actions. "It is not too late for anyone to come to his senses in his actions", the editorial ended, "South West Africa is waiting." A week later the same paper said that the churches did not need to hold a conference about contract labour, but rather that they needed one about church affairs as some churchmen had been neglecting their "church" work for the last few months. The Nationalist press was doing its best to sow suspicion in the minds of its readers that the strike was church organised. Almost all the strikers were Christians, and they were taking action against a system which the church hierarchies had long since condemned. The press could surely not expect the churches to be condemnatory or to neglect the issue as if it had never happened.

With the increased world attention on South West Africa came the inflow of foreign journalists, and wanting to get as close to the grass-roots as possible they approached the churches for information and contacts, and interviews with and comments by the Bishop and other church officials began appearing in overseas papers. Understandably most of this presented the side of the story that the South African authorities would rather not have leaked out. But it was important that it did.

Then violence broke out in Ovamboland. Communication between the strikers and the traditional headmen had totally broken down, because of the headmen's inability to convey to the South African government the real griev-

ances of the strikers, and the government's insistence that the headmen were the only representatives of the Ovambo people to whom they would listen. With such tensions it is not surprising that isolated incidents between strikers and headmen occurred, but when police re-inforcements were flown in "to maintain law and order" the patience of the Ovombos became exhausted and several people lost their lives in clashes with the police. It was in this atmosphere that Bishop Winter decided to visit the mission in Ovamboland at the end of January to ensure that everyone was safe, and it was on this week-end that he pleaded on several occasions for an end to the bloodshed, and made a special trip to meet with the elected representative of the strikers to discuss the situation. It was here that he learnt that the Magistrate in Ondangwa was refusing permission for relatives of Robben Island detainees to visit the prison, and it was after he had confronted the magistrate with this that his permit to be in Ovamboland was immediately withdrawn, and he was ordered to leave the Bantustan. This effectively cut him off from 90% of church members under his care.

During this time the trial of twelve alleged strike leaders had started in Windhoek on charges of inciting people to strike and with threatening people with violence. In order that justice was seen to be done it was essential that the strikers obtain the best legal defence possible, and the Anglican church undertook to pay the legal costs of the men, on a promise of help from donors in America. An observer from the International Commission of Jurists flew in for a few days to observe the trial, but on the first day it was postponed to allow the defence team to prepare its case more fully. When the trial resumed on February 14th there was a new international observer. Judge William Booth of the New York Criminal Court, a leading Episcopal layman and a Negro civil rights leader. Judge Booth was one of the first black V.I.P. visitors South West Africa had ever had, and being deeply involved in the church stayed as the guest of Bishop Winter, but he also established a strong relationship with all he met, and stayed one night in Katutura, the Windhoek location, as a guest of Chief Clemens Kapuuo of the Herero. The mere presence of a successful black American, and the message of hope he brought with him raised excitement among the black Windhoek



population. Judge Booth gave, in Bishop Winter's house, one of the most memorable press conferences in the history of South West journalism. For not only were there white reporters and editors present, but black politicians had been invited to sit in, and the whole gathering lasted over three hours.

The next morning's headlines were: **BISHOP COLIN WINTER CONFESSES**, and under this were two stories, one dealing with the payment of the defence team at the strike trial, and the other an erroneous third-hand quote of what the Bishop had told a Dutch Reformed Minister about his attitude towards a Lutheran pastor visiting Windhoek actively campaigning for an anti-communist body. (No further details can be given here as this particular report is at present the subject of a court action in which the Bishop is claiming R15 000 damages from the newspaper). Public opinion was now whipped up to its whitest fury (the Blacks were greatly admiring). And two days later there appeared seven letters in the English newspapers from people claiming to be Anglicans disassociating themselves from the Bishop, some of his staff and their remarks.

Two days later, on Friday 25th February, at 2.00 p.m. the South West African Legislative Assembly met for the last day's sitting of its annual short session. Without any debate, and passing through all three stages within an hour, the all-Nationalist assembly voted to amend Proclamation 50 of 1920, the Undesirables Removal Proclamation. Up till then, the

Administrator of South West Africa had the power to declare any person "undesirable" and order him to leave the territory. If he so wished, however, the alleged "undesirable" could refuse to comply and demand to be brought to court and was then given a chance to state his case, and the Administrator had to give his reasons for his decision. The court would then decide as to whether the expulsion should be carried out or not. The amendment of February 25th, sought to bypass the courts, so that if the alleged "undesirable" did not comply with the order to leave he would be arrested and liable to one year's imprisonment. Any chance of him being given a hearing was ruled out.

Despite the fact that the amendment was passed only at 3.00 p.m. an extraordinary edition of the South West Gazette was published later that day in which the amendment was promulgated.

On Saturday morning the office of the Secretary for South West Africa worked overtime, and at 1.20 p.m. two Security policemen called at the Bishop's house.

"... NOW THEREFORE I, JOHANNES JACOBUS KLOPPER, in my capacity as Secretary for the Territory of South West Africa, do hereby, in terms of section 1(1) of the Removal of Undesirables Proclamation, 1920 (Proclamation No. 50 of 1920) as amended, order you, the said THE RIGHT REVEREND COLIN O'BRIAN WINTER, to leave the Territory of South West Africa before 12 noon on the fourth day of March, 1972."

**BANNED — SABELO STANLEY  
NTWASA.**

on the 17th February, 1972.  
restricted to the Kimberley district.  
house arrested from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m.  
on weekdays; house arrested all day  
and all night on weekends.

"This deplorable action is not the responsibility of just the Security Police — but it is the responsibility first of white South Africa, and also black South Africa, for we have allowed the oppressive chains of racism too much leeway by our silence..."

*Statement by the South African  
Students Organisation.*